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Solidarity and Conflict Between Adult Children and Parents: A Latent Class Analysis

Using multiple dimensions of solidarity and conflict in a latent class analysis, we develop a typology of adult child–parent relationships. The data (N = 4,990) are from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. In descending order of relationship quality, the 5 types are harmonious (akin to relationships with friends), ambivalent (intensive exchange of material support accompanied by strain), obligatory (just keeping in touch), affective (emotionally supportive with few other meaningful exchanges), and discordant (predominantly negative engagement). The types are differentiated by gender, age, family size, geographic distance, and parental marital history, indicating that they are not fixed but are shaped by social-structural conditions.

The life courses of children and parents can be described as co-biographies, implying high levels of interdependence (Hagestad, 2002). Bengtson (2001) predicts a larger significance of intergenerational bonds in the 21st century given the socio-demographic changes that have taken place in all Western societies. The number of years of shared lives between generations is greater than at any time in history given the increase in longevity. In addition, because of the drop in fertility rates, the number of within-generation ties has decreased relative to the number of across-generation ties (Farkas & Hogan, 1995).

The nature of family relationships is also undergoing change. Under the influence of processes of individualization, family relationships are becoming more like achieved ties (Beck, 1986/1992). The exchange of support is less often economically and normatively motivated and more often guided by affective and individual concerns (Lye, 1996). Commitment and support giving are increasingly shaped by the quality of past interactions and are subject to continuous negotiations. Nevertheless, culturally prescribed notions about duties and obligations continue to play a role in family relationships. Striving to achieve a balance between normative expectations and personal goals and circumstances is a source of complexity in family interactions.

Family sociologists have become increasingly aware of the challenges of incorporating the complexity of intergenerational relationships in theory and empirical research. One of these challenges is to investigate family conflict as well as family solidarity (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1996). Along the same line, Connidis and McMullin (2002) argue there is a need to pay attention to intergenerational ambivalence, which they view as competing structurally patterned demands that are experienced by parents and their adult children in their interactions with one another. We take on the challenge and empirically investigate the push and pull in adult child–parent relationships.

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Solidarity and Conflict

Intergenerational solidarity and conflict have mostly been studied separately. In social research, there is a tendency to portray families either as

places of peace, refuge, and harmony, or as places of abuse, anger, and violence (Bengtson et al., 1996). The underlying assumption is that family solidarity and conflict are each other's opposites on one continuum, ranging from high solidarity and low conflict to low solidarity and high conflict. The notion that solidarity and conflict are opposites ignores the common knowledge that, though family life is programmed for cooperation, love, mutual support, and happiness, there is also a high probability for family members to have conflicts (Sprey, 1969). According to classical sociological theory, the coexistence of harmony and strain is inevitable in close relationships such as family ties (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1904).

We propose to examine the cooccurrence of solidarity and conflict. A first reason is that conflicts often arise in situations where solidarity is demonstrated. Caring for chronically ill older parents is an example (George, 1986). The unidirectional flow of rewards and resources can be a source of resentment and strain. Similarly, in the situation of coresiding adult children and their parents, conflicts are not uncommon (White & Rogers, 1997).

A second argument in favor of simultaneously considering solidarity and conflict is that both can have positive and negative implications. Though the positive effects on mental and physical health of supportive exchanges are well documented (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Uchino, 2004), it has also been reported that solidarity can be "too much of a good thing" from the perspective of the beneficiary, or it can be "too much of a burden" from the perspective of the giver (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998; Silverstein, Chen, & Heller, 1996). Moreover, it appears that negative interactions with adult offspring play a larger role than positive interactions in shaping the health and well-being of elderly parents (e.g., Krause & Rook, 2003). In an overview article, Lincoln (2000) concluded that negative interactions are potentially more harmful than social support is helpful. Unsurprisingly, severe conflict and social negativity in personal bonds have been shown to bring harm to a relationship (Bertera, 2005; Rook, 2003). Just as building up antibodies in the human body is a positive response to disease, however, the quality of relationships might be higher if at least some conflict occurs (Coser, 1956). Empirical evidence has indicated that conflict, in the sense of having disagreements and resolving them,

can have a positive function and can improve relationship quality (Rook, 2001).

Two conclusions can be drawn from the previous considerations. First, we should avoid reducing problematic features of child-parent relationships to the absence of solidarity. As Bengtson and colleagues have argued previously, there might be four rather than just two solidarity-conflict combinations. Apart from high solidarity/low conflict and low solidarity/high conflict combinations, one should also find relationships that are characterized as intense ties (high solidarity and high conflict) and ties in which low solidarity coincides with the absence of conflict (Bengtson et al., 1996). Second, the joint analysis of solidarity and conflict should help identify when these features have positive and when they have negative implications for relationship quality.

Ambivalence

Only recently, by applying the concept of sociological ambivalence (Merton & Barber, 1963; Smelser, 1998) to family ties, efforts have been made to step away from the simplistic idealization of kinship in which family members are assumed to maximize positive and minimize negative interactions. Ambivalence, as conceptualized by Connidis and McMullin (2002), emphasizes the tensions between social structure and individual lives as people attempt to meet their own, their family's, and society's contradictory demands and expectations. These authors view ambivalence as "structurally created contradictions that are made manifest in interaction" (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 565).

Ambivalence has been measured in two ways (Priester & Petty, 2001). One is to directly assess perceptions of ambivalence by asking respondents to what degree their feelings or attitudes toward the parent or child are mixed (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). An alternative strategy is to capture ambivalence by separately measuring positive and negative feelings about the relationship (Fingerman, Hay, & Birditt, 2004; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Both approaches focus on feelings and perceptions.

Our approach is different: We model ambivalence in terms of contrasting *behaviors* (solidarity and conflict) rather than in terms of feelings about these behaviors. We focus on behaviors because we view ambivalence as a characterization of relationships. To assess what kind of

relationship exists between people, information is required about what they do together (Duck, 1983; Dykstra, 1990). Another reason for preferring a behavioral to a perceptual measure of ambivalence is that the latter might reflect the respondent's psychological state rather than inform us about relationship content. The focus on *contrasting* behaviors corresponds with Connidis and McMullin's (2002) view that ambivalence involves push-pull situations where children and parents are torn between demands, obligations, normative expectations, and time schedules. We measure this push-pull as high levels of both solidarity and conflict (the *intense* ties described by Bengtson et al., 1996).

Whereas Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) argue that intergenerational relationships are always characterized by ambivalence, Connidis and McMullin (2002) view ambivalence as one of a number of transitory states in which family relationships may find themselves. Depending on how contradictory demands and expectations are negotiated, relationships may be characterized by solidarity, conflict, or ongoing ambivalence. In line with this view, Fingerman et al. (2004) found that the majority of adult children (56%) experience the ties to their parents as solely close, one third (38%) experience them as ambivalent, and 6% experience them as solely problematic.

Multidimensionality

In the intergenerational solidarities model developed by Bengtson and colleagues (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Mangen, Bengtson, & Landry, 1988), six dimensions of solidarity were distinguished: affectual, consensual, functional, associational, structural, and normative solidarity. Unfortunately, these six dimensions have largely been examined in isolation of one another (e.g., Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991). As a result, the nature of the associations among the different solidarity dimensions remains unclear. It is not unlikely that different associations emerge, depending on the motivations underlying interactions (Suitor, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1995). For example, if exchanges are duty driven, the provision of practical support need not be accompanied by emotional closeness. If however, affection is the motive, then high levels of practical support will go together with high levels of emotional support.

In the present study, we not only consider multiple solidarity dimensions (contact frequency; exchanges of financial, practical, and emotional support), but also multiple sources of conflict (conflicts over practical and personal issues). Drawing upon the work of Clarke, Preston, Raksin, and Bengtson (1999), we do not assume that children and parents who have conflicts in one area also have them in other areas. Similarly, we do not assume that the associations among different acts of solidarity are necessarily positive. Our analysis requires an empirical method that explicitly considers the multidimensional association between solidarity and conflict measures. We focus on the construction of a *typology* of child-parent relationships. Compared to a more conventional technique such as factor analysis, which is more concerned with the structure of variables (i.e., correlations), a typology focuses on the structure of cases (i.e., clusters of subtypes). Rather than rank ordering measures along separate underlying continua, a typology estimates a multivariate mixture of groups of cases (Hagenaars & Halman, 1989; Yamaguchi, 2000).

Typologies of intergenerational relationships have been modeled previously with U.S. data (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Using data from the Netherlands, we expand on this work by including conflict. In addition, we consider child-parent relationships across the entire life course rather than restricting them to a certain life phase. Last, we include two modes of contact, namely face-to-face contact as well as communication by telephone, letters, and e-mail. Drawing upon the work of Bengtson et al. (1996) and that of Connidis and McMullin (2002), we expect to find four broad types of child-parent relationships: ambivalent (high levels of both solidarity and conflict), predominantly solidarily, predominantly conflicted, and detached (low levels of both solidarity and conflict). We expect that these broad types will be further differentiated by specific combinations of solidarity and conflict dimensions.

Research Questions

The first research question we address is whether types of child-parent relationships can be empirically distinguished, and if so, what their incidence is. We do not view relationships as fixed into specific types. They change in response to changes in the lives of the parties involved and are shaped

over the course of ongoing negotiations. The second research question is whether the distinguished types of child-parent relationships vary by the gender and age of those involved, geographic distance, family size, and the parents' marital history. Earlier we argued that solidarity and conflict can have both positive and negative consequences. Our third research question addresses the outcome of solidarity-conflict combinations: Do the types of child-parent relationships differ in terms of relationship quality?

Sociodemographic Predictors

Gender. The family as a social institution is often approached as women's problem area, irrelevant to men's trajectories (Krüger & Levy, 2001). Women are the kinkeepers: They are more likely to specialize in and feel responsible for personal contact, emotional support, information flow, domestic maintenance, and organizing ritual occasions (Rosenthal, 1985). Following these considerations, we predict that women are more likely to be part of a predominantly solidarity relationship than are men.

Women more often find themselves in contradictory roles than men. They have fewer opportunities for personal development than men, for example, in education and employment (Walby, 1990), although they are expected to be successful on the labor market as well as to keep up their kinkeeping skills and to care for spouses and elderly parents (Willson et al., 2003). The bond between daughters and mothers is the most intense tie within families, with mothers reporting higher emotional closeness and more tension in the relationship with daughters compared to that with sons (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). We expect that women are more likely to have ambivalent ties than are men.

Age. The interdependencies between children and parents are structured by biographical time (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Settersten, 2005). During the establishment phase of early adulthood, in which the child is pursuing higher education, entering the labor force, acquiring the first home, and starting a family, the child generally depends on parental support (Gulbrandsen & Langsether, 2000). A difference in views between children and parents regarding whether children owe their parents respect or about whether received support should be repaid can be the source of conflicts. In old age, there is often an inherent tension between

the declining authority of parents as they struggle with decreasing independence and the growing authority of children over parents' lives (George, 1986). Following the preceding arguments, we expect to see high probabilities of conflict and ambivalence in child-parent relationships when the children are young adults and when they are in advanced middle age.

Geographic distance. Studies on intergenerational exchange of support tend to consider geographic distance as an opportunity for exchange (e.g., De Jong-Gierveld, 1998). Relatively low exchange costs, that is, living nearer, increase the exchange rate. High exchange rates mean there are more situations of interdependence in which exchange partners can have conflicts (Coser, 1956). We expect that geographic distance decreases the likelihood that a dyad is characterized by solidarity, ambivalence, or conflict and increases the likelihood that a dyad is characterized by detachment.

Family size. Child-parent contacts are less frequent in large than in small families (e.g., Spitze & Logan, 1991), first because children can share responsibilities toward their parents with siblings and second because parents must divide their time and energy over a greater number of offspring. We expect to find an inverse relationship between family size and the likelihood that a child-parent dyad is characterized by solidarity. It is unclear what kind of an association to expect between family size and the likelihood of experiencing conflict. One argument is that in a larger family there are more goods and services to give and to gain and consequently that the probability for conflict and ambivalence increases. An alternative argument is that siblings can help to canalize tensions through reasoning or social control, so conflict and ambivalence will be less common.

Parents' marital history. Parental divorce increases the risk of having broken, weakened, or disrupted family ties (Dykstra, 1998; Fischer, 2004; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). We expect more ambivalence, conflict, and detachment if parents divorced than if they remained together. On the one hand, widowhood tends to bring the generations together. On the other hand, increasing levels of contact and support exchange might engender more conflicts between adult children and parents if the latter are widowed than if they are still together.

METHOD

Data

The data are from the public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, a large-scale survey on the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). Between 2002 and 2004, computer-assisted personal interviews were held with over 8,161 men and women aged 18 – 79 who form a random sample of adults residing in private households in the Netherlands. Approximately 5% of respondents were nonnative Dutch, meaning that both parents were born outside the Netherlands. The response rate was 45%, which is comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (see Dykstra et al.). Response rates in the Netherlands tend to be lower than elsewhere and they seem to be declining over time (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001). The Dutch appear to be particularly sensitive about privacy issues. In the present study, with the exception of the multivariate analyses, the data were weighted to make them better representative of the Dutch population aged 18 – 79.

The data set has 8,579 reports on the relationship with a surviving biological parent. When respondents reported that they had had no contact with a parent in the past 12 months, no questions were asked about support exchanges or conflict. By necessity, we excluded the data from these respondents, thereby reducing our sample size by 219 (2.5%), to 8,360 child-parent dyads. Most (85%) of respondents who had not been in touch with their parents in the past year rated their relationship with them as *not very good*, which is the lowest score on a scale of 4. We also excluded the data from 501 adult children (5.8%) who were living in the same household as their parents to avoid having patterns of interaction, contact frequency, and support exchange confounded with coresidence. The remaining 7,859 dyads consist of 4,990 adult children, of whom 2,869 reported on two and 2,121 on one parent. In the former case, we selected one child-parent dyad per family randomly, to avoid within-family dependencies, leaving us with 4,990 child-parent dyads.

Measures

Latent class analysis (LCA) was applied to construct the typology of child-parent relationships

(see the next section for details). The input for LCA is a cross-classification table of the scores for each variable in the analysis. It is customary to use dichotomous variables (cf. Hogan et al., 1993; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Though dichotomization implies a loss of information, it ensures having a manageable number of cells in the data matrix. An analysis on the basis of eight dichotomous measures, for example, results in 2^8 or 256 cells. Using all answer categories would produce unacceptably sparse data.

The following *solidarity* measures were used. The frequency of face-to-face contact and of contact via telephone, e-mail, and letters in the past 12 months were assessed separately. We constructed two variables: monthly face-to-face contact and monthly contact otherwise with 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*. We had two financial support measures: whether the child had given valuable items or a substantial sum of money to the parent in the past 12 months, and vice versa. The answer categories were 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*. Two variables for the exchange of practical support were used: whether the child had helped the parent with chores in and around the house, lending things, transportation, and moving things in the past 3 months, and vice versa. The answer categories were dichotomized as 1 = *once or twice/several times* and 0 = *not at all*. Finally, we had two measures for emotional support: whether the adult child had shown an interest in the personal life of the parent in the past 3 months, and vice versa. The answer categories were dichotomized as 1 = *once or twice/several times* and 0 = *not at all*.

To assess *conflict*, the question was asked: "Have you had any conflicts, strains or disagreements with [the target parent] in the past 3 months?" A maximum of five conflict topics could be listed: money, practical matters, norms/values, politics, and the relationship itself. Five dichotomous measures were constructed for each conflict topic, with 1 = *once or twice/several times* and 0 = *not at all*.

The following set of *sociodemographic characteristics* was included in the analyses. Gender of the child and parent were coded as 1 = *male* and 0 = *female*. Three dummy variables were used for the age of the child: 18 – 30, 31 – 50, and 51 and over. Geographic distance was measured in kilometers and determined on the basis of the postal codes of the children's and parents' addresses. In the Netherlands, postal codes refer to small geographic locations (e.g., 10

houses on a particular street). To avoid heteroskedasticity, geographic distance was logged. Family size was the number of the child's living siblings. Three dummy variables were used for parents' marital history: *married*, *divorced or separated*, and *widowed*.

The outcome measure *relationship quality* ranged from 1 = *not great* to 4 = *very good*. The question in the interview was "Taking everything together, how would you describe your relation with [target parent]?"

Analyses

In LCA, one assumes probabilistic rather than deterministic relationships between the latent construct (the concept of interest, in this case the cooccurrence of solidarity and conflict) and manifest indicators (the measures actually used) (Hagenaars & Halman, 1989). A basic assumption of LCA is conditional dependence, which means that associations between manifest indicators exist only insofar they measure the same latent construct. LCA has the advantage that the classes of the latent construct are discrete and need not be ordered along a continuum (Clogg, 1995). In this study, the classes are typical scoring patterns for the solidarity and conflict measures.

We started by computing a latent class model with only a single latent class (no relation between manifest indicators) and added one class after the other, checking for model fit and significance. We used the program Latent GOLD 4.0, developed by Vermunt and Magidson (2005). We tested the model with CONDEP, a program for diagnosing the assumption of conditional dependence in latent class models (Uebersax, 2000). Finally, we determined the robustness of the latent class model regarding gender and age by estimating separate latent class models for child-father, child-mother, son-father, son-mother, daughter-father, and daughter-mother dyads, and for dyads distinguished by the adult children's age (age 18 – 30, 31 – 50, and 51 and over).

To examine the associations between sociodemographic characteristics and child-parent relationship type, we applied multinomial logit regression analysis (Liao, 1994), which is an extension of the binary logit model. The multinomial logit model (MNL) is appropriate because the categories of the dependent variable (i.e., types of child-parent relationships) are discrete,

nominal, and unordered. With n categories, the MNL is roughly equivalent to performing $2(n - 1)$ binary logistic regressions. In the MNL, all the logits are estimated simultaneously, which enforces the logical associations among the parameters and makes a more efficient use of the data (Long, 1997). To interpret the MNL results, we estimated marginal effects (Liao). The marginal effect gives the change in probability by one unit change in an explanatory variable when all other variables are held constant at sample mean values. For example, the marginal effect for a dummy variable is the difference between being in Category 1 and being in Category 0. Per variable the marginal effects sum to 0. Finally, we used an ordinary least-squares regression model to estimate the differences in relationship quality by type of child-parent relationship.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Descriptive information on the child-parent dyads in the sample is presented in Table 1. As the table shows, the dyads are unevenly distributed by gender: There are relatively few son-father ties and relatively many daughter-mother ties. Adult children aged 31 – 50 form the largest group of respondents. The oldest dyad is composed of a 79-year-old son and a 103-year-old mother. The mean distance separating children and parents is 46 km. The average number of siblings is 2.7. Approximately half of the adult children have parents with an intact marriage; 13% experienced parental divorce. The perceived relationship quality is relatively positive: a mean of 3.17 on a scale of 1 – 4.

Table 2 provides information on solidarity and conflict. Four out of five adult children see their parents once a month or more often. The same proportion is in contact by telephone, e-mail, or letters at least once a month or more often. Children are less likely to give financial support to their parents than to receive it from them. The reverse pattern is found for the exchange of practical help. Emotional support is exchanged in the majority (around 90%) of child-parent relationships. Conflicts are relatively infrequent, and when they occur they are most often about practical matters and about norms and values.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of the Child-Parent Relationships (N = 4,990)*

	<i>M</i>	Range
Dyads by gender		
Son-father	.15	0 – 1
Son-mother	.25	0 – 1
Daughter-father	.22	0 – 1
Daughter-mother	.38	0 – 1
Child age group (years)		
18 – 30	.21	0 – 1
31 – 50	.63	0 – 1
51 – 79	.16	0 – 1
Geographic distance (km)	45.78	0 – 278.83 ^a
Parent marital history		
Married	.51	0 – 1
Divorced or separated	.13	0 – 1
Widowed	.36	0 – 1
Family size	2.70	0 – 17
Relationship quality	3.17	1 – 4

Note: Analyses based on weighted data.

^aZero km for parents and children living in the same postal code area.

Typology of Child-Parent Relationships

We reduced the number of measures in the LCA for reasons of manageability. First, we dropped financial support given to the parent because this is very rare. Second, we subsumed emotional support given and received under one measure of emotional support exchanged (1 = *yes*). Third, we collapsed conflicts about money and about practical things into a measure of conflicts over material issues (1 = *yes*), and we collapsed conflicts about norms/values, politics, and the relationship itself into a measure of conflicts over personal issues (1 = *yes*).

Table 3 shows the results of the LCA. Though we had expected to find four types of child-parent relationships, the optimal number turned out to be five (see Table A1 in Appendix for details on model fit). Conditional dependence diagnostics showed that the assumption of local dependence holds for the five-type solution. When separate latent class models for subgroups of child-parent dyads varying by gender composition and age were estimated, the same general typology emerged, indicating that it is highly robust across all the distinguished subgroups of child-parent relationships.

As can be seen in the top row of Table 3, 40% of child-parent dyads are of the first type, 29% are

Table 2. *Solidarity and Conflict Items: Descriptive Statistics (%) (N = 4,990)*

Solidarity	Few times or less	Monthly	Weekly or more
Annual face-to-face contact	18	49	33
Annual contact otherwise	21	41	38
	No	Yes	
Financial support given to parent	95	5	
Financial support received from parent	81	19	
	Not at all	Once or twice	Several times
Practical help given to parent	37	33	30
Practical help received from parent	60	23	17
Emotional support given to parent	7	23	70
Emotional support received from parent	11	22	66
Conflict			
Money	97	2	1
Practical matters	90	7	3
Norms/values	92	6	2
Politics	97	2	1
Relationship itself	93	5	2

Note: Analyses based on weighted data.

of the second, 16% of the third, 11% of the fourth, and 4% are of the fifth type. These percentages are the cumulative probabilities of all child-parent dyads of belonging to the respective types. The coefficients in the columns of Types 1 – 5 indicate the probability that a dyad is characterized by specific dimensions of solidarity and conflict, under the condition that the dyad is of that type. For example, there is a 97% probability of at least monthly face-to-face contact in Type 1 child-parent dyads and a 7% probability of having conflicts about personal issues.

The likelihood of at least monthly face-to-face contact broadly distinguishes the first three dyad types from the last two: It is high for Types 1, 2, and 3, and low for Types 4 and 5. A high probability of emotional support exchange is characteristic of both Types 1 and 2. Though the

Table 3. Latent Class Analysis of Child-Parent Relationships (Probabilities) (N = 4,990)

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
%	40	29	16	11	4
Solidarity					
At least monthly contact face to face	.97**	.95**	.96**	.03	.02
At least monthly contact otherwise	.89**	.89**	.49**	.79**	.09
Practical help given ^a	.66**	.87**	.52**	.20**	.09**
Financial support received ^a	.16**	.31**	.09**	.18**	.04
Practical help received ^a	.49**	.57**	.19**	.07*	.01
Emotional support exchanged	.99**	.94**	.55**	.92**	.10
Conflict					
Material issues	.01**	.25**	.07**	.04**	.05*
Personal issues	.07*	.21**	.11**	.10**	.18**

Note: Analyses based on weighted data.

^aViewed from the perspective of the adult child.

p* < .01. *p* < .001.

probability of exchanging practical support is generally on the high side for both types, it is higher for Type 2 than for Type 1. The likelihood that adult children receive financial support from their parents is higher for Type 2 than for any other type. The characteristics of Type 2 relationships, with their high probability of support and conflict, match those of the *ambivalent* type we had expected to find. The characteristics of Type 1 relationships do not fully match those of the predominantly solidarily type we had expected to find. Though the probability of emotional support exchange is highest for this type, the probability of exchanging practical and financial support is not. Given the low likelihood of conflict for Type 1 relationships, we assign them the label *harmonious*.

Though Type 3 shares a relatively high probability of at least monthly face-to-face contact with Types 1 and 2, the likelihood of exchanging practical, financial, and emotional support, and the likelihood of conflict are neither high nor low. Intermediateness on all dimensions with the exception of the probability of monthly face-to-face contact is distinctive for this type. For that reason, we use the label *obligatory* to describe Type 3 dyads.

Apart from a low probability of at least monthly face-to-face contact, Types 4 and 5 are characterized by low probabilities of exchanging practical and financial support. The probability of conflict over personal issues is a distinguishing feature: relatively low for Type 4 and relatively high for Type 5. Both types have a low probability of conflict over material issues. The probabil-

ity of emotional support exchanges is another distinguishing feature: relatively high for Type 4 and relatively low for Type 5. Neither type has the characteristics of the hypothesized detached type (low support, low conflict) or of the hypothesized predominantly conflicted type. Given the relatively high probability of emotional support exchange and of monthly contact by telephone, letter, and e-mail, we assign the label *affective* to Type 4 ties. Given the low likelihood of contact and exchange of support, and the relatively high likelihood of conflict over personal issues, we assign the label *discordant* to Type 5 dyads.

By using dichotomized measures of conflict, one cannot differentiate a child-parent relationship in which there is one minor strain in a three-month period from one in which there is frequent and ongoing conflict. In separate analyses (results obtainable from the first author upon request), we explored the effect of using the full range of the answer categories. The structure of the resulting typology was similar but not easily interpretable. We also explored the effect of using the original five conflict measures. Results showed that they clustered into the dimensions we had distinguished (conflicts over material and over personal issues). In our view, the use of the full range of measures provided no added value.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 4 shows the associations between relationship type and a set of sociodemographic

Table 4. Sociodemographic Predictors of the Five Types of Child-Parent Relationships: Marginal Effects of Multinomial Logistic Regression (N = 4,990)

	Harmonious	Ambivalent	Obligatory	Affective	Discordant
Child's gender ^a	-.05	-.02*	.05*	.01	.00
Parent's gender ^a	-.08*	-.01	.07*	.01	.02
Child age between 18 and 30 years ^b	-.00	.18**	-.12**	-.05*	-.01
Child age between 31 and 50 years ^b	.06	.06*	-.11**	-.00	-.00
Geographic distance (log)	-.07**	-.03**	-.06**	.08**	.01**
Child's number of siblings	-.01	-.03**	.02**	.00	.01**
Parents divorced ^c	-.13**	.03	-.03	.06*	.07**
Parent widowed ^c	-.07	.05**	-.00	.01	.01

^a0 = female, 1 = male. ^bReference category = child age between 51 and 79 years. ^cReference category = parents married.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

characteristics. As the table shows, the distribution of relationship types varies by gender of the participants. Relationships with mothers are more likely to be harmonious than are those with fathers, a finding that is consistent with the notion of mothers as kinkeepers. As predicted, daughters are more likely than sons to be part of ambivalent ties. Table 4 shows furthermore that sons and fathers are more likely than daughters and mothers to be part of obligatory ties. This finding suggests that men's intergenerational ties are more often characterized by frequent contact with moderate rather than high levels of support exchange than are women's.

The distribution of relationship types also varies by age. Though we had predicted a U-shaped association, the data show that the likelihood of being part of an ambivalent relationship decreases linearly with age. This finding suggests that the push-pull that is characteristic of ambivalent relationships declines as children reach middle adulthood and beyond. The likelihood of being part of an obligatory tie is greatest when children have passed beyond middle age and parents have reached the last phase of their life. Insofar as child-parent relationships exist where "just keeping in touch" rather than intensive support exchange is the norm as is the case in obligatory ties, they are most prevalent at advanced ages. Table 4 also shows that being part of an affective tie is less likely in young adulthood than when children have passed beyond middle age. Taken together, the findings on age differences suggest that children disengage from and become less involved with their parents as they move from young adulthood to middle age and beyond.

The distribution of relationship types by geographic distance is consistent with expectations. Geographic distance decreases the likelihood of being in relationships with a high probability of monthly face-to-face contact (harmonious, ambivalent, and obligatory ties), and increases the likelihood of being in relationships with a low probability of face-to-face contact (affective and discordant ties).

Family size also turns out to be a significant predictor of relationship type, and largely along the lines we had expected. Consistent with the notion that support exchanges are more dispersed in larger families, we find that family size is positively associated with the likelihood of being part of an obligatory tie and negatively associated with the likelihood of being part of an ambivalent tie. Table 4 also shows that children in larger families are more likely to be part of discordant ties, suggesting that in the event of conflict, interactions decrease to a minimum, presumably because responsibilities can be more easily deferred.

Consistent with the expectation that parental divorce increases the likelihood of separation in families, we find a negative association between divorce and the likelihood of being part of a harmonious tie, and a positive association between divorce and the likelihood of being part of a discordant tie. We had contrasting expectations regarding the effect of widowhood on child-parent relationships. As Table 4 shows, parental widowhood increases the likelihood of being part of an ambivalent tie. Apparently, widowhood introduces strains into the relationship with adult children.

Relationship Quality

Differences in relationship quality between the five types of relationships are shown in Table 5. Harmonious child-parent relationships are rated most positively, followed by ambivalent ties. Obligatory and affective parent-type relationships receive moderate quality ratings. The quality ratings of these two types do not differ. The quality of discordant child-parent relationships is rated the most negatively by far.

DISCUSSION

Our study shows that child-parent relationships cannot be placed along a continuum where solidarity implies the absence of conflict and vice versa. Neither can they be grouped according to perpendicular axes denoted by high and low levels of solidarity and conflict. Our results suggest a more complex configuration of child-parent relationships: The distinguished solidarily behaviors are not always exhibited simultaneously, just as the likelihood of having conflicts in one area does not imply the likelihood of having them in other areas.

Different dimensions and combinations of solidarity and conflict are the discriminating features of the five types of child-parent relationships that emerged in our analyses. Children and parents in harmonious relationships are likely to see each other frequently and to exchange emotional support. Children and parents in obligatory relationships are also likely to see each other frequently, but the likelihood of exchanging financial, practical, and emotional support is only moderate. They are more likely to experience conflict over material and personal issues than those in harmonious relationships. The interactions of children

and parents in ambivalent relationships have a high likelihood of being characterized by all dimensions of solidarity and conflict. Children and parents in affective relationships are unlikely to see each other and to exchange practical support but are likely to exchange emotional support. The likelihood of conflict over material issues is low in these relationships, whereas there is a moderate likelihood of experiencing conflict over personal issues. Finally, children and parents in discordant relationships are unlikely to interact or to exchange any kind of support. The likelihood of conflict over material issues is relatively low, but the likelihood of conflict over personal issues is high in these relationships.

The relationship typology provides a nuanced picture of factors contributing to quality in child-parent relationships. Harmonious relationships, which resemble those with friends, are rated most positively overall. Ambivalent relationships, which have the highest likelihood of conflict but also the highest likelihood of exchanges of financial and practical support, receive the next most positive rating. Clearly, conflict in child-parent relationships should not be equated with poor quality. Obligatory and affective relationships receive moderate quality ratings. Though children and parents in obligatory ties are likely to see each other frequently, they are not necessarily close. The findings on affective relationships suggest that, in the absence of other meaningful exchanges, a high likelihood of emotional support is not sufficient for relationships to be regarded as good. Discordant relationships have extremely poor-quality ratings. In these relationships, interactions are likely to be infrequent and support exchanges are likely to be nonexistent. Here, we have conditions where conflict is associated with poor relationship quality.

With our use of a behavioral measure, our assessment of ambivalence differs from previous approaches. The findings show that ambivalence is not a general characteristic of child-parent relationships as some scholars have suggested (e.g., Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998) but is manifested in one type. In this type, a high likelihood of exchanging financial and practical support is associated with a high likelihood of having conflicts over material and personal issues. Our results suggest that ambivalence is most prevalent when structural conditions offer fewer *escape* options (Smelser, 1998), such as when there are fewer options to defer responsibilities to other

Table 5. Differences in Relationship Quality by Type of Child-Parent Relationship (Ordinary Least-Squares Regression, N = 4,990)

	B
Ambivalence ^a	-.22**
Obligatory ^a	-.53**
Affective ^a	-.51**
Discordant ^a	-1.86**
Constant	3.43**
R ²	0.21

^aReference category = harmonious.

p* < .01. *p* < .001.

family members (living nearby, small number of siblings, widowed parents), difficulties acting against normative obligations to care (daughters, cf. Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Willson et al., 2003), and dependence on parental assistance (young adulthood).

It is interesting to compare our results to those of Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) who analyzed a U.S. sample of adult children who reported on the relationships with their surviving parents. Their measures were not identical to ours but sufficiently similar. Silverstein and Bengtson did not differentiate between face-to-face contact and contact by telephone, e-mail, or letter, did not include items on financial support or on conflict, included an item on similarity of opinions, and geographic distance was incorporated in the typology itself. Five relationship types also emerged in their analyses. Our harmonious type resembles their sociable type, our obligatory type resembles theirs, and our affective type resembles their intimate but distant type. Insofar as only exchanges of support are considered, our ambivalent type resembles their tight-knit relationships (highest likelihood of exchange), and our discordant type resembles their detached relationships (lowest likelihood of exchange).

The consideration of conflict brings additional insights. Our analysis reveals that children and parents who exchange high levels of support, particularly financial and practical support, are most prone to conflict. Whereas Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) describe child-parent relationships with high levels of exchange as "the most cohesive group" (p. 445), our findings point to ambivalence in these relationships. Our analyses reveal furthermore that children and parents who are not notably involved in any exchange of support are also prone to conflicts, disagreements about personal issues in particular. Whereas Silverstein and Bengtson speak about a lack of engagement, our findings suggest predominantly negative engagement.

The Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) sample is virtually identical to ours in terms of the focus on noncoresident ties, the age range, and the proportion of female respondents. The proportion with divorced or separated parents is higher in the U.S. sample (19% vs. 13%), as is the proportion non-White (12% vs. 5%). These differences are not surprising, given that the U.S. has a higher divorce rate and a longer history of migration. The U.S. is a larger and less densely populated country, so it is not unreasonable to assume larger

geographic distances separating children and parents. In our view, these cross-national differences are unlikely to have implications for the typology of child-parent relationships (a similar dimensional structural should emerge in the U.S.), but the frequency distribution of types is likely to differ. The higher U.S. divorce rate implies a lower proportion of harmonious ties, for example, whereas the greater geographic distances imply a higher proportion of affective ties.

The low response rate is a limitation of our study. Analyses of the representativeness of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study sample (Dykstra et al., 2005) revealed an underrepresentation of single men and of men in couple households, an underrepresentation of young adults, and an overrepresentation of women with children living at home. Residents of highly urban and highly rural areas are also underrepresented in the sample, a pattern that one often sees in survey research. We see little cause to think the typology of child-parent relationships is affected by the selective response, just as we feel cross-national differences are unlikely to have implications. The robustness of the typology across age groups and gender composition of the dyads provides ground for this view. It is reasonable to assume, however, that selectivity affects the distribution of relationship types (e.g., an underestimation of the proportion of ambivalent ties given the underrepresentation of young adults in the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study sample).

The typology characterizes child-parent relationships as they exist at a particular point in time. It provides only a snapshot of the interactions in which children and parents engage. Such a frozen image does not do justice to the dynamics in their lives. Relationships change over time as the participants enter new phases of life, as their circumstances and the circumstances of those who are dear to them change, and as the participants attempt to manage to conflicts, imbalances, and insecurities. In our view, future research efforts should be directed at studying shifts in the typology over time. Questions to be addressed involve the frequency of change in child-parent relationship type and the explanation of why some dyads change from one type to another.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. *Model Fit for the Optimal Number of Classes in the Latent Class Analysis (N = 4,990)*

Number	df	L^{2a}	p Value	BIC ^b
1	247	2,296.9	.00	202.8
2	238	661.6	.00	–1,356.2
3	229	431.4	.00	–1,510.1
4	220	333.5	.00	–1,531.6
5	211	226.7	.22	–1,562.2
6	202	194.1	.64	–1,518.5

^aLikelihood ratio statistic. ^bBayesian information criterion.